



National Association of Christian Ministers

Answering His Call to Advance the Gospel and Unite the Body of Christ.

250 S. Pleasantburg Dr. Ste. 125, Greenville SC 29607

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Priesthood of All Believers: Explained and Supported in Scripture

This article:

- 1) **defines** the priesthood of all believers;
- 2) **reviews** its origin in church history; and
- 3) **supports** the doctrine with scripture.

Protestantism is a Christian system of beliefs that resulted in the independent separation of believers from the authority of the Catholic Church. This event in church history was not intended to condemn Catholics, but rather to declare independence to practice Christianity apart from the government of Catholicism. American history holds deep roots in this doctrine by the motives of many of our founding fathers who migrated here to enjoy the freedom of religion. Such freedom later became the driving force of our declaration of independence as a nation, and the first amendment of our constitution.



This is evidenced by the words of the Mayflower compact, which opens stating:

"Having undertaken, for the Glory of God and advancement of the Christian Faith and Honor of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the First Colony in the Northern Parts of Virginia... in the year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King James, of England, France and Ireland" [1].



As a side note, this is the same King James that gave us the King James Bible of 1611.

The Encyclopedia of American Studies states:

"The Pilgrims were English settlers, members of a Separatist sect, who emigrated to New England in 1620 in search of the opportunity to practice their religion without persecution. England had been in religious turmoil for years. Henry VIII challenged the Pope's authority and broke with Rome in the 1530s, assuming the role of head of the church" [2].

In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams said:

"The general principles, on which the Fathers achieved independence, were . . . the general principles of Christianity." [3]

The Influence of Martin Luther on the Priesthood of All Believers

Yet, much of this history, even the very existence of the U.S. can be linked to the philosophy of Martin Luther who is often credited for turning the church's

attention back to the biblical teaching of the priesthood of all believers. He openly expressed his thoughts that the pope and bishops anoint, consecrate, and dress in manners different from common people, but argued that such is no indicator of spirituality or even genuine Christianity. **His premise was that all baptized believers hold the rites of priests by the authority of 1 Peter 2:9 [4].** It is with the zeal of this message that **Luther sparked the reformation and the birth of Protestantism.**

In another publication Luther argues that it is hypocritical to think that the laity should be separated from the clergy when we are forced to accept that all are equal in Christ. Further, he points out that the clergy has no authority over the laity except that which the laity gives them by their free appointment [5].

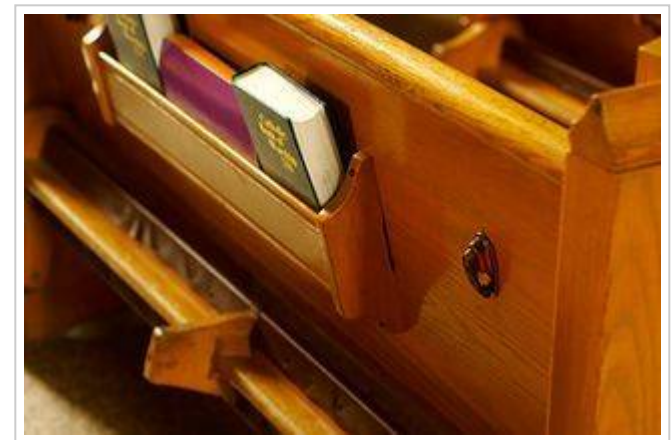
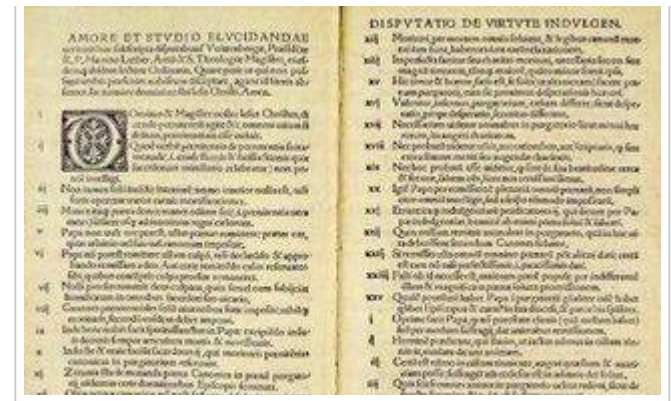
Luther held three central affirmations that gave fuel to the reformation:

- 1) That the role of priests are nothing more than "functionaries" because all believers are priests. The functionaries are those who merely serve publicly as priests.
- 2) That all believers have the right to interpret scripture, and need not be dependent upon the pope.
- 3) That all believers have the authority to call other believers unto the council of the Word of God.

The Heresy of Nicolaitanism

Jesus said to the church at Ephesus: Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Rev 2:6 ESV).

Jesus said this to the church at Pergamum: So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. (Rev 2:15 ESV).





This must be important for Christ to mention it twice in the same chapter and to say that he hates it!

Dr. Tim Lahaye writes in his book *Revelation illustrated and made plain*:

The word “Nicolaitans” comes from two Greek words: niko, meaning “to conquer, or overthrow,” and laos, meaning “the people or the laity.”.... They tried to establish an ecclesiastical order. This latter heresy is known as “Nicolaitanism.” This is an unscriptural idea that causes the church to become enslaved by one man or small group of men whose spiritual life can determine the spiritual success of the church. (p. 26.)

He went on to say:

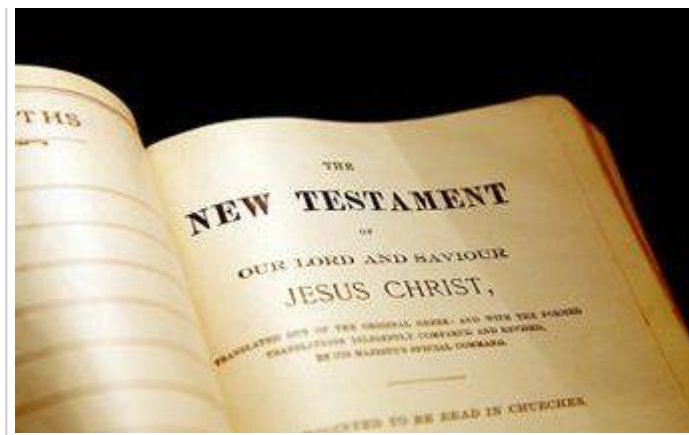
Nicolaitanism is the doctrine of a strong ecclesiastical hierarchy ruling over the laity; this has never been conducive to a strong spiritual condition in the church. Laymen were given no voice in the church affairs, but were required to obey blindly the decrees of the clergy. The clergy then gradually seemed to gravitate to an impractical ivory tower type of existence that separated them more and more from the people. Whenever a minister loses contact with the people, he ceases to be an effective tool in the hand of God. (p. 41.)

Dr. Jack Van Impe writes in his book *Revelation Revealed*:

Not only were the people of the first church of Pergamos worldly, sinful and idolatrous, but they also shared in the wicked practice of the Nicolaitanism as did the church at Ephesus. This, again, is ecclesiastical Hitlerism. It is when the minister says, “I am the head, and you have no choice in the matter,” allowing laymen no voice in the affairs of the church. (p. 35-36.)

Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave (Mat 20:25-27 ESV).

The Following Scripture Supports the Priesthood of All Believers:



1Pe 2:5 ESV

(5). you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be **a holy priesthood**, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1Pe 2:9 ESV

(9). But you are a chosen race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Strong defines this Greek word for priesthood as “the priestly fraternity, that is, a sacerdotal order.”

Thayer’s Definition is: 1) the office of a priest; 2) the order or body of priests.

Rev 1:6 ESV

(6). and **made us a kingdom, priests** to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Again **Thayer’s Definition is:** 1) a priest, one who offers sacrifices and in general is busied with sacred rites

1a) referring to priests of Gentiles or the Jews

2) metaphorically of Christians, because, purified by the blood of Christ and brought into close intercourse with God, they devote their life to him alone and to Christ

Scofield reminds us that the greatest of rights afforded to priests is to have access to God. It was the high priest alone that entered

the holy place on behalf of the people. This access was left as a mystery to the people. The earthly body of flesh and blood held by Christ is symbolic of the veil that separated the holy of holies from the people. But when he was crucified, his flesh was torn and the veil over the holy place was torn apart. This was a direct signal from God that through Christ, all believers have priestly access to Him (Heb 9:7, 10:19-22) [6].

Heb 10:19-24 ESV

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

This is the evidence by which we hold the doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers.

We will now consider the function of the NT priest.

The Believer's Priestly Responsibilities



Ministers Offer the Sacrifice of Themselves

Rom 12:1 ESV

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Php 2:17 ESV

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

1Jn 3:16 ESV

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. We are to keep the praises of His name on our lips.

Heb 13:14-16 ESV

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Ministers Share the Gospel, Train Others, and Perform the Rite of Baptism

Mat 28:18-20 ESV

Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Ministers Control Their Speech

Jas 1:26 ESV

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

Ministers Visit and Support the Weak

Jas 1:27 ESV

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit

orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Heb 13:16 ESV

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have,
for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Gal 6:9-10 ESV

Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and
especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Ministers Keep Themselves From Sin

Jas 1:27 ESV

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans
and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Ministers Pray and Intercede for Others

1Ti 2:1-4 ESV

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,
for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified
in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people
to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Col 4:12 ESV

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling
on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

Conclusion

The National Association of Christian Ministers holds the doctrine of the priesthood of believers. We believe this position is taught in scripture, perpetuated by church history, and affirmed by the origination of the American people.

Therefore, on the authority of Scripture, and the obligation of the Great Commission (Mat 28:18-20), as a body of believers we ordain ministers in obedience to God.

Further Considerations

"The priesthood of all believers... means that in the community of saints, God has constructed his body such that we are all priests to one another. Priesthood of all believers has more to do with the believer's service than with an individual's position or status. We are all believer-priests. We all stand equally before God. Such standing does not negate specific giftedness or calling. It rather enhances our giftedness as each one of us individually and collectively does his part to build the body (Eph. 4:11-16). We are all priests. We are all responsible." (Daniel Akin in Perspectives on Church Government, p. 37)

Statement from the Southern Baptist Convention [8]:

"We affirm the priesthood of all believers. Laypersons have the same right as ordained ministers to communicate with God, interpret Scripture, and minister in Christ's name. That is why the Convention requires strong lay involvement on its boards. This doctrine is first and foremost a matter of responsibility and servanthood, not privilege and license. It is of course, a perversion of this doctrine to say that all views are equally valid, that you can believe anything and still be a Baptist or that the pastor has no unique leadership role."

References

- [1] 1620, William Bradford: History of Plymouth Plantation, c. 1650.
- [2] Pilgrims. (2010). In Encyclopedia of American Studies.
- [3] June 28, 1813, The Adams-Jefferson Letters, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), vol 2, pp. 339-40.
- [4] Luther, 1520. To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation.
- [5] Luther, 1520. On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church.
- [6] 1917. The Scofield reference Bible.

[7] Daniel Akin, p. 37. Perspectives on Church Government.

[8] Southern Baptist Convention <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/pspriesthood.asp>

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